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Treatment of the Insane as Related to Science
and General Conditions of Humanity,
Historically Considered.

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Read before the Mississippi Valley Medical Society, September 12, 1889.



TREATMENT OF THE INSANE AS RELATED TO SCIENCE,
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Dr. Andrew Dickson White, late President of Cornell, in one of his "New Chapters in the Warfare of Science,"† says: "Of all the triumphs won by science for humanity, none has been farther reaching in its good effects than the modern treatment of the insane." To all persons interested in the transitions of humanity incidental to its historical development, especially such as are engaged in scientific pursuits, this affirmation is worthy of attention. Is the inference that the modern treatment of the insane is a result of some triumphant conflict of science with an opposing force—the specific effect of a specific cause—sufficiently correct and comprehensive to bear repetition without danger of misleading the uninformed or the appearance of boasting?

To answer this question intelligently we must familiarize ourselves with the history of the treatment of the insane at all times, and in all countries, as well as with its recent history in our own land. With this object in view it is easy to ascertain encyclopedically that among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, for many centuries preceding the Christian era, the insane were treated, as were other persons impaired by bodily infirmities, humanely and remedially by physicians. That especially among the Greeks, their temples of health, corresponding to our hospitals, were thronged by the insane, many of whom recovered by short residence therein. That from and after the supercession of pagan civilization by that of Christianity, until quite recently, the insane were of all men most miserable. That they were treated—not humanely nor remedially, nor as other human beings suffering disease—but as outcasts from society and human sympathy, abandoned by God and tormented by devils. That they were scourged, starved, imprisoned, executed as criminals, and permitted to die from exposure and neglect. That a few found seclusion, but neither comfort nor cure—comfort is cure—in monastic cells. That the first hospital for the insane in England was established near the middle of the sixteenth century for the accommodation of about fifty lunatics. That the name of this hospital "Bethlehem," suggestive of peace and hope, soon degenerated into that of "Bedlam," suggestive ever since of noise, confusion, anger and despair. That a second hospital was established in London called St. Luke's, in 1751. That houses for the detention

*Read before the Mississippi Valley Medical Society, September 12th, 1889.

†Popular Science Monthly, March, 1889.



of lunatics, with a view to public safety, existed in other cities of England in the latter half of the eighteenth century. That private asylums, really prisons of the worst description, where insane persons were secluded from observation, existed, and continued to exist, unchallenged by public opinion, until far on into the present century. That matters were no better in other countries before the year 1792, when the so-called modern treatment of the insane was inaugurated simultaneously in France and England. That the transition from barbarous to humane treatment of the insane was effected in France by the appointment of a Dr. Pinel to the superintendency of the hospital-prison for male lunatics in Paris, and signalized by his action in "striking off the chains and other engines of restraint from those under his care"—and in England by the institution of the now famous "York Retreat," by William Tuke—a worthy member of the Society of Friends, and a practical philanthropist—for the benefit of the insane as well as the public good—where the same general principles of treatment introduced by Pinel in Paris were carried into operation; and a still further innovation was made by abolishing, or greatly diminishing, the use of the lancet and depressing drugs in the "Retreat." That the experiments of these two men aroused public attention and enlisted public sympathy; but that not until 1836 was so-called "mechanical restraint," meaning thereby chains, cages, straight-jackets and other appliances of barbaric invention, really or nominally dispensed with in any public asylum in England. That total abolition of mechanical restraints was accomplished in the Lincoln Asylum by house-surgeon Hill, about 1838, after a process of gradual reduction extending through many previous years, under the direction of the visiting physician, Dr. Charlesworth. That Dr. Conolly, of the Hanwell Asylum, soon after adopted the new practice, and by his superior advantages gave greatly increased impulse to the reformation. That the treatment of the insane in America has always followed closely, but not servilely, that of England. That all progress or reform in the treatment of the insane since the days of Pinel and Tuke has been but a continuation and expansion of their work. That the modern treatment of the insane is characterized at the present time by—

- (a.) Commodious and substantial public buildings for their care.
- (b.) Appropriations of public moneys for their maintenance.
- (c.) Supervision by government officials of their treatment.
- (d.) Medical treatment by reputable physicians appointed and paid by the State.

- (e.) Legal recognitions of their rights and the irresponsibility of the insane as dependent citizens of a defective class.
- (f.) Employment, under supervision, of such as have failed to recover mental capabilities under medical treatment but are not disqualified for some kind of useful labor.
- (g.) Systematic effort to increase the capabilities of the permanently impaired by judicial training.
- (h.) The utmost personal liberty, and individualization of treatment, compatible with the well-being of the person treated, and due consideration for others affected thereby.

But such statements do not justify the affirmation that this modern treatment is attributable *per se* to the action of science. Science, thus far, unless it be social science, developing with, but not in advance of, an orderly historical development of humanity, is not to be recognized in the proceeding. We must look farther. We must read history more comprehensively and more philosophically. We must ascertain the relation of the treatment of the insane in every stage of transition from antecedent to consequent conditions, to all other aspects of humanity; religious, political, moral, medical, &c., before presuming to ascribe it as a specific result to a specific action of a specific cause.

It may be said, aphoristically, that "whatever is—is an inevitable sequence of antecedent conditions." That all of the various affairs of life, when aggregated, constitute a general condition of humanity, savage or civil, harmonious in itself; and that the specific features of a general condition are so intimately associated and interactive, such general condition must be comprehended before any special feature can be intelligently considered. (A bit of philosophy that some medical specialists might do well to make a note of.)

What then were the general conditions of humanity of which treatments of the insane were special features, at the historic periods above referred to?

The general conditions of prehistoric humanity, as certified to us by existing peoples incapable of history, and the mystic legends that preface all ancient historic records, out of which have grown or descended all subsequent conditions, were characterized by profound ignorance of the qualities, capabilities and activities of the real or natural world, and correspondingly comprehensive concepts of a hypothetical or supernatural world; hence by overshadowing superstition and general savagery.

Of the treatment of the insane associated with such conditions it is not necessary to enquire. We should learn but little by so doing. The common statement, however, that insanity is a disease of civilization, is

irrational and untrue. Insanity is a manifestation of disordered brain, and whoever, or whatever, has brain, is liable to become insane.

From prehistoric conditions of humanity to the highest civilized state the transition is continuous and orderly, however protracted; as are all of the processions of nature.

The condition of humanity constituting Greek civilization, when at its height, was characterized by a degree of intellectual capability and an accumulation of knowledge never before exhibited by any people. Modern civilization—like Roman quarrymen in the ruins of the Colosseum—finds in its classic remains imperishable material ready fitted for its uses.

The religious aspect of this general condition, from which alone much might be inferred, was more rational than superstitious, more philosophical than theological, more human than divine. Supernatural beings of all grades, from Jupiter and his companions down to the most familiar spirits—never since the days of Grecian adolescence regarded as other than more or less exalted and immortalized varieties of men—however once believed to be interested in the affairs of their inferiors, were now looked upon as remote, if not entirely disinterested, spectators of the conduct of mankind; having retired, as it were, into a solitude, and the enjoyment of repose, peculiar to themselves. The moral aspect of this general condition was characterized by complex ethical and esthetical conceptions—broad views of responsibility, right and duty, and an acute sense of justice. Politically this condition was characterized by a passionate regard for liberty, and patriotism, illustrated by wise statesmanship and heroic deeds.

But no other aspect of this condition was more significant than that of medicine. For while the medicines of all other peoples not derived from the Greeks did not rise above the common level of superstition and fetishism, that of the Greeks was rational, recognizing diseases as natural processes remediable by natural appliances. Even insanity was regarded by it as a manifestation of physical disorder, and treated as such.

The general condition of humanity constituting the civilization of Europe after the accession of papal Christianity to power, for many centuries, was characterized, so far as the Greek and Roman people were involved in it, by intellectual retrogression, or involution of capabilities, indicated by a final subordination of all individual liberty of thought and action to an ecclesiastical despotism claiming to be of supernatural appointment, prescribing beliefs and practices, with penalties attached of the most portentous and direful character; by which the advancing columns of civilization were turned backward, and other

human processions were compelled to grope in darkness, haunted by spectres horrid and innumerable, for a thousand years.

The religious, or rather, the sacerdotal, feature of this general condition dominated all others. By it all knowledge of the real world and all aspiration to know were suppressed as sinful. Nature was regarded as accursed and all of its suggestions as corrupting, false, and evil. The hypothetical was restored to supremacy over the imaginations of men. Jehovah, a Hebrew God, before unknown to the west, and Satan, a Persian divinity, unknown to Moses, but recognized by the Jews after their intimate association with the east, were enthroned over all the west. Pagan gods innumerable were deposed and subordinated to these Semitic and Iranian conquerors. Jupiter no longer thundered from Olympus, but a voice was heard from Sinai farther-reaching and more terrible. Men were taught to look upon themselves as degraded beings, their living bodies vile, and all organic appetencies, however essential to existence, inimical to the welfare of their souls. And their souls—mythical impersonations of mental phenomena—were to be regarded as spiritual beings under ban; accursed by their, so-reputed, disappointed and indignant Creator, who had once in anger destroyed all but a saving remnant of life on earth and now held mankind, in relation to himself, as condemned criminals sentenced to eternal banishment from his presence, and endless torments in the realm of his co-regnant, if not co-equal, rival. Unless rescued by the timely interference of divinely appointed officers, by whom an arrest and final reversal of judgment, might be affected on conditions specified, but not otherwise; all efforts of a self-helping character being worse than useless.

This general condition of humanity, continuing far on into the fifteenth century, can hardly be said to have had a "moral" aspect. As a matter of fact, after apostolic and patristic Christianity had been superceded by papal ecclesiasticism, there was an involution of morals effected among the Greek and Roman populations corresponding to the suppression of learning and reason. Morals spring spontaneously from cultivated intellectual soil, but flourish, only, in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom.

The political aspect of this condition presented but two phases—despotism and servility. Despotism is always cruel. Servility and immorality are inseparable. Despotism governs by force and fear. Servility cowers and sneaks and lies, or shrugs its beaten shoulders and meditates revenge. Like the whipped school-boy, it says to itself, "Just wait till I get big enough, and you'll see!" It is a fortunate

inheritance of humanity—this anticipation of growth and future compensation.

The medicine of this general condition was what might now be inferred. Medicine is always either superstitious, transitional, or rational. Superstition and reason, in fact, constitute the extremes of a continuous intellectual procession, between which may be found, classifiable—as pertaining to one or the other—all of the phases of every condition of humanity, individually or racially considered. The medicine of papal Europe before the “revival of letters” and consequent evolution of rationalism and morals, was but little else than a by-play between hypothetical emissaries of Satan inflicting diseases upon mortals and ecclesiastical taumaturgists pretending to avert or remedy such inflictions by supernatural powers conferred upon them by Jehovah or Jesus.

Of the general condition of humanity constituting modern civilization but little need be said. It is familiar to us all. In it we recognize new growths, surpassing all former growths, or previous civilizations, in the variety and extent of its attainments. Its most conspicuous characteristics are—freedom and science. The breadth and brilliancy of its scientific aspect distinguishes it from all precedent conditions of humanity. Its religious aspect, no longer a flat surface of superstition and despotism, reflects the light of freedom and intelligence from innumerable facets. It is distinguishable, politically, from former conditions by broad and growing recognitions of the inherency of human rights, and the brotherhood of mankind. Its medical aspect, in its higher presentations, (regular medicine) is strictly “rational”—all theories and practices reflecting knowledges, derived by observation of, and generalization of principles from, facts—thus conspicuously contrasting all phases of medicine, past or present, in which fanciful hypotheses predominate, or find acceptance.

From which facts, however limited, as compared with the wide range of facts to which they are harmoniously related, the following conclusions may be drawn:

(a.) Human recognitions of the existence, imminence, and intimacy with human affairs, of supernatural beings, are inverse to the development of human capabilities and knowledges. In other words, as men advance the gods recede.

(b.) Human conditions characterized by immaturity, ignorance and consequent superstition, are characterized, also, by sacerdotal despotism and popular servility, associated with general immorality and cruelty of disposition and practice.

(c.) Human conditions characterized by enlarged and cultivated intellectual capabilities, are characterized, also, by broad and harmo-

nious recognitions of the qualities and activities of the material universe, and the relation of phenomena thereto; and, consequently, a supercession of superstition and its concomitant fetishisms, despotisms, immoralities, and cruelties—by rationalism and its concomitant sciences, liberties, moralities, and humanities.

(d.) The treatment of the insane, as an affair of life, at any given time—whether barbarous, remedial, or humane—is a phase only, of a general condition of humanity and not a special result of an independent movement, of whatever forces.

In view of which facts and inferences, may it not be reasonably asked if it would not convey a more comprehensive, truthful, and instructive idea, instead of saying, as Dr. White has done. “ Of all the triumphs won by science for humanity,” &c., to say : of all the triumphs of humanity incidental to its progress from infantile to mature conditions of capability and knowledge—from the mists of superstition to the clear atmosphere of reason—that which is indicated by the modern treatment of the insane is by no means the least conspicuous?

It is true that this saying would sound more amicable; but that fact, alone, should not detract from its merits.

What is science but an inseparable feature of a general condition of humanity—a condition that in its entirety is always harmonious? Why represent science as a panoplied knight “righting the wrongs and avenging the injuries” of humanity by hand to hand combat with demons, dragons, and other “chimeras dire,” born of superstition? Why talk of the conflicts of science with religion—when as a matter of fact no such conflict has ever taken place? What is religion, but another feature of a general condition of humanity, harmonious in its relations to all the rest? Religion and science are, alike, conditions of consciousness: the one a condition of feeling, the other a condition of knowing. They pertain, it is true, to different degrees of capability; but to degrees that are continuous, one above another, as the upper surface of any solid object is continuous with the lower, however distinct and distant, but never antagonistic. Belief in the truthfulness of false statements, however incorporated as dogmas, confessions of faith, or pretended histories, does not constitute religion. To deny and disprove such statements does not constitute an attack upon, or defeat of, religion. Religion is not a matter of, or dependent upon, statements. It is as compatible with the Koran as with Paul’s epistle to the Romans, or the gospel of St. John. As well satisfied with the memorable relations of Hesiod and Homer as with the pious utterances of ancient Hebrew poets. As content with the cosmography of Berossus as with that ascribed to Moses.

Furthermore—recurring to the treatment of the insane as related to science—there is no evidence that Pinel or Tuke, who inaugurated what is called the “modern treatment” of the insane, boasted of as a triumph won by science for humanity, was, either of them, instigated to action as a champion of science; or by any other motive than that which sometimes emanates from a common consciousness of humanity, incidental to its historical development, not inaptly called “the spirit of the age.”

Pinel was a physician, it is true; but the medicine of his day as compared with that of ours, was far from scientific. Biology, with its numerous subdivisions, had not reached the dignity of science. Physiology was rudimentary. Psychology was a part of metaphysics, which, as is well known, “the more you study the less you know about it.” Pinel was, also, a Frenchman; and both himself, and his work, when liberating the insane from dungeons and chains in the Bicêtre, were as much a part of the great French Revolution then going on around him, 1792, as were the siege of the Bastile, the constituent assembly, the commune, the execution of the King, the Reign of Terror, Marat, Mirabeau, Charlotte Corday, Danton, Robespierre, and all the rest of that wonderful convulsion of humanity, to which science contributed only as a general, not as a special, antecedent; by which science, as a conspicuous feature of a subsequent general condition of humanity, has greatly profited.

So, too, William Tuke was noted for his interest in humanity as a philanthropist, but not as a man of science. Aroused to indignation by abuses brought to light in the management of a neighboring asylum for the insane; as a consistent and respected member of the society of Friends, and follower of George Fox, it is more probable that he felt, and believed himself to be, impelled to, and guided in, his work by what he recognized as a supernatural being, the “Holy Spirit,” than that he gave heed to a single suggestion of science recognized as such.

The fact is that both of these men, champions of humanity! without knowledge of each other’s doings, or knowing it themselves specifically, were but giving expressions to an undefined but voluminous sense of oppression, falsehood, fraud and wrong, made evident to a large fraction of mankind by a general increase of capabilities and knowledges, effected by the inherent qualities and activities of living matter, the irresistible force of human growth! contributive to the development of science but not indebted to science for its impulses or accomplishments.

